

Transcript Prepared By the Clerk of the Legislature
Transcriber's Office

Health and Human Services Committee
January 29, 2010

[CONFIRMATION]

The Committee on Health and Human Services met at 1:30 p.m. on Friday, January 29, 2010, in Room 1510 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on a gubernatorial appointment. Senators present: Tim Gay, Chairperson; Kathy Campbell; Mike Gloor; Gwen Howard; Arnie Stuthman; and Norman Wallman. Senators absent: Dave Pankonin, Vice Chairperson. []

SENATOR GAY: All right, well, we'll get going, convene the meeting of the Health and Human Services Committee. We're going to do two things today. One is a confirmation hearing for, I think it's Acela Turco. Hopefully, I got that right for the Foster Care Review Board, and then we're going to have just a...then we will pretty much just have a briefing. This is not a big deal--on the Division of Children and Family Services just to get caught up with Todd and some of his budget things--informative briefing. I know several committee members have told me, and I know Senators Howard and Stuthman both have bills they're introducing, so if we're going...Senator Gloor and Campbell, and I think Senator Pankonin is not going to join us today, but just whatever. We do have the information you sent us--very good on that. But this...we will have the microphones going on the public hearing. Then we're going to shut those off and just have a conversation, quite honestly. I expect to be out of here not real late--2:30 or 3:00-ish at the most, probably. You're going to get... []

SENATOR HOWARD: You'll be gone when we come back probably. []

SENATOR GAY: Yeah, so, anyway but for the record, we'll introduce ourselves. I'm Senator Tim Gay from Papillion-La Vista, and we'll start over with our... []

MICHELLE CHAFFEE: I'm Michelle Chaffee. I'm legal counsel for the committee. []

SENATOR GAY: And Senator Mike Gloor and Senator Kathy Campbell and Senator Dave Pankonin will be joining us--Dave won't. []

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Senator Arnie Stuthman from Platte Center, District 22, which is the Platte County area around Columbus. []

SENATOR HOWARD: Senator Gwen Howard, District 9 in Omaha. []

SENATOR WALLMAN: Senator Norm Wallman, District 30, great District 30, Homestead area. []

DENISE LEONARD: I'm Denise Leonard. I am the committee clerk. []

SENATOR GAY: And then the pages are here to help, or one page, here to help in any

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way if we have any handouts. Let's...we'll ask Acela to come up and we'll start on that confirmation hearing. Hopefully, I'm pronouncing your name right (inaudible) excuse me. []

ACELA TURCO: You did. Yes, you did. []

SENATOR GAY: But we have information here that was given to us, and but then you can tell us about yourself and anything else you got. And we may ask you a few questions or we may not. So go ahead, I'll turn it over to you. []

ACELA TURCO: Okay, all right. Thank you. Hello, my name is Acela Turco, and I would like to thank Senator Gay and everyone else on the Health and Human Services Committee for allowing me to be here today. I know that this appointment is very serious and important to the well-being of the children that are in the foster care program. I have many years of experiences that I believe will make me an asset to the board. I currently own a business and will bring sound business management practices to the board. I also have several years of experience in the quality assurance field. I have experiences as a certified quality evaluator for government agencies, and I was a paraprofessional in the Millard School District helping special education students. This experience gave me an insight to the goals that can be accomplished if you have the necessary tools. And just as importantly, I am a wife and a mother of two children. I also have been very active in the community, school, and the PTO. I did have the opportunity today to attend a Foster Care Review Board meeting, and I had the pleasure of meeting several of the board members there. After attending that meeting, I know that I have a lot to learn about the specific board responsibilities, but I will use all of my experiences to assist the board and the foster care program to place the children in safe and permanent homes. I believe that my passion for the children and my desire to help, along with all of my life experiences, will allow me to bring balance to the board. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Very good. Any questions from the committee? Senator Stuthman. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Thank you, Senator Gay. Acela? [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Is this your first time of ever serving on a board? Have you served on the other boards before this? [CONFIRMATION]

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ACELA TURCO: Yes. I serve on the Millard Business Association Board currently.
[CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Okay. Maybe you said that, but I wasn't paying attention.
[CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: No, I did not. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: When you serve on boards, do you...is it your opinion to concentrate on issues brought to the board as far as the care of the foster children, as far as how the foster kids are being cared for? I know this is, you know, you're just attending your first one, and it's going to be hard to say. But... [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: Right. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: And what I'm trying to emphasize is the fact that I would hope that, you know, the board members of the Foster Care Review Board, you know, deal with issues that would better the children that are in foster care systems.
[CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: That is my understanding that that is the goal of the board members.
Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Um-hum, yeah. Okay, okay, and that...that, and I really appreciate the fact that you're going to take the time to do that and be committed to the welfare and the betterment of these foster kids. [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: Yes, sir, that is my goal. Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Okay, okay. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Senator Howard. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Thank you, Chairman Gay. Well, I really appreciate that you're willing to do this, and it sounds like you have a very open mind about the Foster Care Review Board, and you're willing to come in and take a look with fresh eyes. And I think this is an interesting time to be on that board with the move toward...for want of a better word, the privatization of the Health and Human Services Welfare Division. I really look forward to getting information from you and don't hesitate to contact me if I can ever be of help. But good luck, and I think you'll do a great job. [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR GAY: Any other questions? I got a question. How did you get interested in this board and what got you to this point that you're interested in? I mean, you have, you know, children, of course, and it's a great board. But why this one? I see you're on other...other boards. Why did you choose this one, I guess? [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: Um-hum. Well, a little bit of my background. I'm originally from Virginia. In Virginia, I had the opportunity to meet a couple of social workers, and I started asking questions, you know, how...what is the process in Virginia? So in Virginia, I did have the opportunity to meet those two social workers and start asking questions. And, of course, I had 20 more questions, but I moved on. Then here in Nebraska, one of my neighbors was a foster care parent, and she actually adopted a little boy through that program. So I asked her a lot of questions, and I still do to this day. You know, how's it going? You know, what did you have to go through as an individual and as a family? So I saw that this was available, and I thought, hmm, I think I'm going to look into it, so I did research. And then I asked if I could be appointed to the board. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Yeah, that's awesome. That's how it happens. Senator Wallman. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR WALLMAN: Thank you, Chairman Gay. Yeah, thanks for being interested in children. And do you feel as a state agency, we have too many hoops to climb through for a person to adopt a child or...? [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: I cannot answer that question at this time, sir. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR WALLMAN: Yeah, sure. Thanks. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Were you on the judicial nominating commission, though, too? [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: Yes, I am currently. Yes. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Oh, okay because I saw that on this executive... [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: I haven't had to do anything yet, but I...my name is on there (laugh). [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Yeah. My wife is on one of those too, and they haven't...she hasn't either so it happens. But anyway. Well, very good. It looks like you're very well-qualified. You got another question, Senator Stuthman? [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Yes, thank you, Senator Gay. Acela, how long have you been

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in Nebraska? [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: Ten years. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Ten years. Do you plan to stay here? [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: Yes, sir, I do. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Do you like Nebraska. [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: Yes, I do. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Even though we do tax you a lot. (Laughter)
[CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: (Laugh) I'm not going to comment on that. But, yes, I do plan to stay here for many years, you know. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Okay. Well, and the reason I...I just brought that question up is the fact that, you know, is, hopefully, our state is attracting people to come to our state and that you stay here for a long time and, you know, I really appreciate that, hoping that you will stay here and be an asset to the state of Nebraska. [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: I plan to do that. I love living in Omaha. It's a great family town. I believe Senator Howard can agree with me on that. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR HOWARD: Absolutely. [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: It is the best move that my husband and I made. My children love it here. We have gone back to Virginia for vacations, and my children are against going back to Virginia (laugh). So, yes, I plan to stay here. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Okay. And if you ever want to improve yourself just a little bit more, come out to the Columbus area (laughter), rural area a hundred miles west, you will love it even more (laughter). Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Okay. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Senator Campbell. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Thank you, Senator Gay. I just wanted to note that I looked

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in...you are fluent in Spanish. [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: Yes, ma'am. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: With the number of children in the state with ever-increasing Spanish-speaking folks, I think that might be an asset just to kind of understand some of those children and the needs they might have in foster care. [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: I will start asking about that. Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR CAMPBELL: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: I think Senator Stuthman would like it more if you bought another business there (laughter). They own their own business. Do... [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Yeah (laugh). Maybe you could expand and have a satellite. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: ...do a franchise...do a franchise in Columbus, Nebraska. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: Well, your husband must be back there. (Laughter) [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Do a franchise in Columbus, Nebraska. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR STUTHMAN: That's right. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: All right. Well, any other questions? I don't see any. Well, thank you for your willingness to serve and share in your experiences with us, and we'll go from there. We'll take these applications and vote on them when we have an Executive Session. That will be in probably sometime next week. I don't know when. And someone will contact you and let you know where we're at so with that, is there any public comment on this, anyone would like to say this is a public hearing? I don't see any. All right, we're done. Thank you very much for coming down too, appreciate it, taking time out. [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: Thank you very much. [CONFIRMATION]

SENATOR GAY: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

ACELA TURCO: Thank you. [CONFIRMATION]

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SENATOR GAY: All right. We'll move on and Todd Reckling is here to kind of talk about what's going on in Children and Family Services which is a lot, as we know, and... []